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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FEDERAL EXTENSION SERVICE
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EXTENSION'S RESPONSIBILITY TO THE NON-FARM PUBLIC

Cooperative extension work in agriculture and home economics is a joint or partnership undertaking between the individual State land-grant colleges and universities and the Department of Agriculture. As indicated by Congressman Lever, in reporting the bill that became the Smith-Lever Act (copy attached as revised June 1953):

"The principles involved are those of cooperation, the Federal Government aiding by advice and assistance in coordinating effort and the States performing the more important details of local work. This bill places the responsibility for the actual conduct of the work proposed in the agricultural college and provides specifically for the adjustment of work to local conditions through a cooperative relationship established between the college of agriculture and the Secretary of Agriculture."

These principles are further detailed in the uniform memorandum of understanding relative to the conduct of Cooperative Extension Work. (Copy attached.) Sections III (a) and III (d) of this memorandum indicate a joint responsibility for planning lines of work to be undertaken (projects) and the State responsibility for initiating annual plans of work related thereto.

In meeting its joint responsibility for planning lines of work to be undertaken within any given State the Federal Extension Service operates under a policy of maximum local autonomy within the limits of the applicable Federal legislation. Since the areas of productive and essential extension work are so much greater than extension's resources to date can adequately service, and since conditions and problems vary so widely as between States, and counties within States, the Federal Extension Service is convinced that the principle of local determination of work to be given priority should prevail. Hence it restricts itself to counseling with the States as to appropriate shifts in emphasis in extension work, and the allocation and use of available resources, rather than undertaking to superimpose a pattern of use from the Federal level.

With respect to working with non-farm people the Smith-Lever Act itself includes no restrictive provisions. It provides simply that, "In order to aid in diffusing among the people of the United States . . ." (underlining added.) Also the formula in the Act governing the allocation of Federal funds to the States is based in part on the rural non-farm segment of the population. Hence there is no legal barrier preventing any State or county extension unit working with non-farm people.

The Smith-Lever Act grew out of a felt need for a public educational service directed primarily to the needs of rural people. However, continuing operations under any such legislation must take into account changing conditions. The Federal Extension Service maintains that the forces of public opinion and public desire are at least equally significant as the early interpretations of the original enabling legislation in determining both the fields of interest to receive attention and the groups within our population to which Extension should render educational assistance.

On this point the Federal Extension Service in January, 1946 issued a report from which the following is a quote:

"From the operational standpoint, Extension's educational responsibilities extend to all 'the people of the United States' having an interest in 'subjects related to agriculture and home economics,' on an out-of-school basis, irrespective of their place of residence, age, economic status, group affiliations, or other factors that might be used to draw lines of distinction. First responsibility is to the people living on farms, but is not restricted to them."

In a similar vein the joint committee representing the Association of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities and the Department of Agriculture, in its report of August, 1948 on "Extension Programs, Policies and Goals" stated: (page 8, copy attached)

"Extension's responsibilities are not limited to farm people--or even to rural residents. Its obligation, as stated in the Smith-Lever Act, is to 'the people of the United States . . . not attending or resident in said colleges.' This obligation of disseminating the agricultural and home economics teachings of the colleges and the United States Department of Agriculture extends to all interested people in this country irrespective of their place of residence, their age, their group affiliation, race, creed, economic or social status, or other characteristics that might be used to draw lines of distinction."

This report proceeds to list certain non-farm groups in rural areas to which more adequate service should be rendered by extension. It also recognizes extension's responsibilities to strictly urban residents and indicates that the demands from such should be met insofar as resources will permit.

Since this report was approved by both the Association of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities and by the Department of Agriculture it would appear to have the status of a policy enunciation. In any event the Federal Extension Service accepts these principles as sound and is observing them in its counseling with the States with respect to programming, and in administering the Federal Government's responsibilities under the Smith-Lever Act.

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However, it must be recognized that the work of the Cooperative Extension Service is peculiarly subject to the will of the people, particularly at the local level. This work is not only cooperative between the Department of Agriculture and the States; it is also a cooperative endeavor with the individual counties within the States. The counties provide a significant portion of Cooperative Extension Service operating funds.

In addition, some influential segments of our population have rather strong feelings as to how extension's resources should be used. Certain groups organized on a National basis have expressed themselves quite emphatically on the subject on different occasions. With declining prices and declining net farm income in the last few years individual farmers, local farm groups and National farm organizations have been rather specific in expressing their feelings regarding extension work. They have insisted that more of extension's resources be directed to on-the-farm counseling with individual farm families and with more attention to the business side of farming. Most of them are also stressing intensification of extension work in the field of marketing. Some are stressing more work in the field of consumer education.

A number of State extension services over the past decade have been essentially pioneering in working with farm people in a more intensive way on balanced farming or farm and home development programs. The results have been so productive that the demand for further intensification of this type of work is increasing rapidly. However, such on-the-farm individual type counseling service, while highly productive, does exert heavy demands on the time of extension workers. Similarly there has been a significant increase in marketing extension work. This work currently includes, among other emphases, two relatively new phases, namely, (a) educational programs for retailers and other handlers of agricultural commodities and (b) consumer educational programs. This latter phase has been expanding very rapidly with apparently excellent results. The very nature of these program efforts implies working largely with the residents of urban areas.

Paralleling these developments are growing requests from non-farm rural residents, residents of the towns and smaller cities in essentially rural areas, and residents of some of our larger metropolitan areas, for other types of assistance from the Cooperative Extension Service. These requests center around such matters as home gardening and home horticulture; landscaping; home construction, alteration and repair; home management; nutrition and dietary matters; child care; and various phases of 4-H Club work. These are entirely valid claims. In addition extension leaders and others see a need for organized educational work with urban residents on broader and more general fronts such as the importance of agriculture in our economy and the inter-related interests of farm people and urban residents.

All these and related factors must be taken into account by extension administrators in determining the allocation of available resources as well as in program emphasis. Even at the State level, with very few exceptions, these matters are not resolved unilaterally as county governing bodies and county advisory committees have a very strong voice in determining both the extent of extension resources locally and the way in which these resources are used.

All evidence available indicates that the non-farm segments of our population are receiving increasing assistance from the Extension Service. This is reflected in the following table.

ESTIMATE OF FAMILIES ASSISTED WITH AGRICULTURE AND HOMEMAKING PRACTICES AS REPORTED BY COUNTY EXTENSION WORKERS

	1945		1950		1954	
	No. (,000)	%	No. (,000)	%	No. (,000)	%
Farm families	4,765	65	4,629	68	4,146	46
Rural non-farm families	(2,525	35	(2,148	32	1,885	21
Urban families	((3,019	33
Total	7,290	100	6,777	100	9,050	100

These data do not accurately reflect the proportion of time used by extension agents in working with these respective groups. Work with urban groups particularly has been done more largely through the use of mass media as contrasted with a greater amount of individual counseling with farm families. However, they do provide some indication of the trend under way.

The Federal Extension Service recently made an analysis of the extent to which State extension services have employees assigned to work primarily with urban residents. Forty-three of the 48 States show that they have, collectively, 101 such workers. Of these 36 are assigned to the fields of consumer education and marketing information; 39 are working primarily in the fields of clothing, foods, home management and part-time on 4-H Club work; 14 working primarily with urban residents on home gardening, landscaping, insect control and the like; 10 are spending full time on 4-H Club work with urban children and 2 are employed in the field of community organization and development. Of the 43 States analyzed 22 are employing extension workers primarily assigned to urban work. In these States there are 12 cities which are helping to finance the employment of 17 workers located in the respective cities.

In addition, most county extension agents, both men and women, having offices in urban centers do considerable extension work with residents of these centers even though not assigned to work primarily with city people.

Another development of recent date that has considerable significance for extension has been the growing appreciation of the problems of the underemployed segment of our rural population. The study made by the Department of Agriculture, and the President's message to the Congress based on this study, poses quite a challenge to the extension services. This is particularly true in those areas where there are relatively dense concentrations of population in this general category.

Proposals put forward under the title of a Rural Development Program involve actions much broader than extension. They also involve potential solutions beyond agriculture as such. Nevertheless extension can and should make major contributions in such efforts. These will probably take two major forms. First, intensive work with families on the land to help them develop more adequate incomes and levels of living from farming. And for those having too limited opportunities in this direction helping them to seek out other and more promising means of gainful employment. Second, providing the organizational and operational leadership essential to getting all the interested groups and agencies to work together effectively in bringing about occupational and other adjustments on an area basis.

The first of these lines of work is already under way in the unit approach, or farm and home development work, in which extension is currently engaged. No doubt as pilot or experimental Rural Development counties are established, and additional finances provided, extension will concentrate even greater resources in such counties along these lines. The second type of contribution is not at all foreign to extension experience. As such special county programs are gotten under way extension will unquestionably be called upon to render major organizational leadership assistance. Again, both these activities, or contributions to a common effort, will exert heavy demands upon extension's local resources.

The above indicates only a few of the significant problems facing the extension service with respect to the most appropriate allocation and use of resources available. The scene in which extension operates is constantly changing--necessitating comparable changes in extension's programming and teaching procedures. At the same time extension is always faced with the problem of keeping up with changing demands on the one hand and, conversely, not getting too far ahead of those it is attempting to serve on the other.

To help cope with these apparent conflicting forces in these rapidly changing times extension is currently engaged in a Nation-wide effort being referred to as "program projection." This effort is being carried on currently in slightly over 10 percent of the counties of the Nation with plans to continue this process as rapidly as practical until all counties are involved. It involves working intensively with a rather broad cross-sectional group of people in the counties, bringing before them pertinent information bearing upon the welfare of the county and its people, helping them to analyze where they are, where and how they could encourage adjustments of a beneficial nature, problems to be solved and the best solutions to them. Out of these careful deliberations over a period of several months, on an organized and carefully planned basis, extension will have a better basis for its programming and a better opportunity to direct its energies toward help with the more important problems.

In this work the focus is on a period of years ahead rather than the immediate succeeding year as is done in most county extension program planning. With more people involved, with somewhat broader experiences and areas of interest than is usually found in extension's annual program planning groups, and with more careful and exhaustive considerations than have previously been undertaken by extension on any extensive basis, a really firm foundation should be developed for extension's guidance. In those counties having significant numbers of part-time farmers or rural residents, and in those counties having a relatively large urban population, the needs of these groups for extension assistance cannot be overlooked if this job is well done. Evidence to date on the progress of this effort is very encouraging, although not perfect in any given county. As this movement grows and is extended to additional counties next year, and in succeeding years, it should make a most significant contribution to strengthening extension work and giving it more pointed emphasis. Through such a process skillfully done local people can more adequately help to determine the extent to which extension effort should be extended to non-farm groups.

It is recognized that extension workers as a group have not had adequate training of the type best to equip them to give guidance to this type of analytical process essential to keeping extension's efforts attuned to current and evolving needs. At the same time it is recognized that the formal training opportunities afforded most extension workers prior to their entering the profession leaves much to be desired. Hence extension is faced with at least two important needs in overcoming this handicap.

The first of these is more pointed undergraduate training for prospective extension workers better to equip them for such professional work. The other is intensification and perhaps some redirection of in-service training for extension workers on the job. A significant development just getting under way is the Extension Training Center at the University of Wisconsin established to provide organized training for extension administrators and potential administrators. It is anticipated that the services provided by this Center will help to equip extension administrators to do a better job of giving leadership to their State and county staffs, both in developing greater efficiency in the use of resources available and in keeping extension's efforts more effectively attuned to the more important problems and needs at any given time.

In the final analysis, however, it seems quite evident that extension's programs, and the use of extension's resources, must be determined from the ground up rather than from the top down if they are to be most effective. Extension operates in an informal setting--it has no captive audience. It must work with people on problems they recognize. It cannot work effectively with people on problems, important as they may

be, which the people involved do not recognize or feel they cannot do anything about. At the same time a major responsibility of extension is to train people to analyze their situations and to define or recognize problems amenable to some solution which they otherwise might not recognize. This in itself is an important educational responsibility. It is a continuing one, demanding constant attention.

In summary: The Federal Extension Service subscribes to the philosophy that the Cooperative Extension Service, as a public agency, has a responsibility to all segments of our population eligible, under the Smith-Lever Act, to receive assistance from this service. It believes that extension's first responsibility is to farm people--but rural non-farm and urban people also should receive due consideration in the allocation of extension's resources.

The problem is arriving at that division of resources and services which will be reasonably proportionate to the varying needs and which will continue to command the respect and support of extension's various "publics" so that its total contribution and effectiveness will not be impaired.



